

**Illinois Early Learning Council
Data, Research, and Evaluation Committee
Ad Hoc Meeting
March 22, 2016
3:30 pm – 5pm**

Ounce of Prevention Fund, 33 W. Monroe, Suite 2400
Chicago, IL 60603

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Participants:

In-Person: Elliot Regenstein, Teri Talan, Carmen Garcia, Kelley Washington, Dan Harris, Joanna Su, Kate Ritter, Edith Njuguna, Maia Connors, Karen Berman, and Anna Colaner.

Phone: Charles Chang, Brenda Klosterman, Ann Freiburg, Jenna Chapman, Tiffany Gholson, Elizabeth Dabney, Lisa Hood, David Alexander, Jon Furr, Carol Morris, Lauri Morrison-Fritch, Dawn Thomas, Julia Zhu, and Cindy Zumwalt.

- 1. Welcome and Introductions**
- 2. Purpose and Goals of Meeting**

Anna Colaner began by introducing a federal Longitudinal Data System (LDS) grant that Illinois was successfully awarded. The Illinois Data FIRST Project includes eight outcomes and two priority areas.

- Jon Furr said the Illinois Data FIRST Project began fall of last year and there are a number of other projects involved. As a state, Illinois will focus on two priority areas: instructional support and fiscal equity and return on investment. The Early Childhood Return on Investment (ROI) Research Project will link spending data on children and preschool records. The grant will expand fiscal data available to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and use data in the LDS. Regarding the Early Childhood ROI Research Project, the idea is to build off the work occurring in the Early Learning Council and the Research Agenda. The priority questions are found in the accompanying handout titled “Project Outcomes”. This meeting was called to seek input on the scope of analysis that might be done with this grant opportunity.

Elliot Regenstein asked if the discussion should dive into specifics, given that each question is broad.

- Anna Colaner agreed that more specificity is needed. For example, what returns on what investments? All programs or a particular sector? School-based versus home-based? Asking these questions would be helpful to the discussion. Anna called attention to two reports that were sent by prior to the meeting: *Cost savings analysis of school readiness in Illinois* and *Cost savings of school readiness per additional at-risk child in Detroit and Michigan*. Although both reports were published in 2011, the reports provide a context that will help brainstorm ideas. As the Illinois report demonstrates, work has already been done in Illinois within priority question two and cost savings.

3. Request for input: Define the scope of research analysis

- A. *Priority Question 1:* What is the impact of funding choices made at the federal, state, and local level on program quality and stability?
Rationale: As the funding climate changes within the state, the impact funding sources and levels has on program quality and stability must be evaluated.

Elliot Regenstein asked if the focus should be on funding streams. If yes, funding streams would impact both questions as inclusion, at the very least, would consider: Early Childhood Block Grant, Child Care Assistance Program, Head Start, Special Education/Early Intervention, and Home Visiting programs.

Dan Harris said that priority question is more of an infrastructure question. What is the status of the early childhood service delivery structure and what funding stream is a part of that? It is possible that some programs are no longer operating or staff has been laid off. Are smaller providers being put out of business? There are many unknowns.

Maia Connors likes seeing cost data on a large scale. Maia stated the importance of looking at the level of funding for each slot and then the blending and braiding structure that is used. How are funds being mixed and allocated? Are slots being funded by one method versus another or both?

Teri Talan said that often thinking occurs in terms of “either or”. But Teri asked what happens before and after a child enters a program like Preschool For All. At this point, not much is known about the interactions between service delivery components. As a result, Teri asks for caution when considering return on investment.

- Elliot Regenstein said maybe that focus is more related to priority question two and impact. The question related to setting might have to do with universal funding streams and looking at various settings: school-based, private, center-based and home-based settings. How are these being mixed and matched? Is there a combination? Are programs achieving goals on their own right? Is Preschool For All actually delivering on its promise? Next it is important to look at the geographic differences of these programs throughout the state, for example Suburban Cook versus Sangamon County.

Karen Berman asked if the scope is too big or if it should be scaled down. Karen asked, is the goal is get data to answer the questions posed? Or is the goal to carve something out that is achievable and moves some piece of work?

- Jon Furr said consideration should be giving to the priority areas. If there is a broader picture then consideration must be given to the most critical area.

Elliot Regenstein said for priority question one, Illinois has a definition of program quality because of ExceleRate. Perhaps a thorough study could be done to see how well ExceleRate is doing and assess how variables are in supporting a certain level of quality. Here setting and geography could be the variables. Is the money invested in ExceleRate achieving impact?

- Dan Harris asked for clarification—impact in regards to more high-quality programs or related to child outcomes? Elliot said priority question one, program quality, should be taken as given because ExceleRate defines quality and this will lead to priority question two.
- Maia Connors cautioned about using ExceleRate given the alternative pathways that have been created to allow programs get into a standard. Maia did mention that the ExceleRate validation study could help provide clarification.
- Anna Colaner said the struggle with the validation study is that the certain intentions were built into the Race to the Top grant. If ExceleRate is used as the standard of quality, it could possibly be a moving target as the state might want to reflect on the validation study results and assess redesign of the ExceleRate. Also, there are 16 standards within ExceleRate and funding can affect many of those standards on various levels. Perhaps the research study discussed here could compliment the validation study and fill in the blanks.

- Karen Berman proposed if the focus should be programs that have the most barriers to quality improvement. Is it possible to hone in on type of program or look at braided and blended funding? Many of the standards affect several types of programs. Or is the discussion on how stable and unstable funding might look across the different programs?
- Elliot Regenstein said that the question can be left open-ended or perhaps there is an opportunity to revisit it at another point.

Jon Furr said that a separate aspect of the grant is to attain expenditure data at the site level and Preschool for All program. Jon expanded that ISBE is counting and reporting data for school districts at the school level. And in terms of early childhood programs, the project will look at site level data instead of the grant recipient level. As systems are developing, it is possible that the priority questions could be informed by the state-level data that the research team obtains. Jon said the intent is to know how much is being spent and how spending is allocated.

- Anna Colaner said information is only known at the program level and programs may have several sites. This process will allow further breakdown of data.
- Karen Berman asked more about the goal to gather site level expenditure data. Jon said that within school districts, equity analysis is viewed to see how expenditures vary across schools and populations within schools. School district inequities can be drastic and it is unclear if that is true for early childhood education sites. But the basic understanding of inequities across school district funding sparked an interest for this type of project.
- Elliot Regenstein said that in district equity is based on schools receiving undifferentiated funds but school districts is making decisions on how to use those funds. But a program based with grant funding is different but agreed that inequity is likely. The ability to look at site level data might be interesting, but maybe not the most actionable category for the purpose of this discussion. Preschool For All, child care and other funding streams might offer a better opportunity to see if those decisions were optimal and or not. Research would be able to speak to this and the data might inform state policy choices and local funding use.
 - Anna said part of the process might be to see the funding choices at the program level but stability is at the site level. Elliot proposed a narrower question of multisite programs and funds allocation. Then, what if anything can be done? ExceleRate could be a touchstone. The process could distill best practices at a site level.
 - Maia Connors said that given that outcome measures are at the site level—funding at the site level helps look at program variation and look at what works well could be targeted.

Karen Berman asked more about the data and qualitative analysis. It is important to look at both private funds and braided and blended funds. Also, what is meant by outcomes—quality rating or child outcomes? Karen asked if that analysis can be done through this grant. Programs operate with many funding streams including local investment, mental health consultation, private payments, to name a few. This requires deeper analysis. Programs are creating their own model based on all of their funding streams. If we are talking about Preschool For All—it will either be silver and gold because there isn't enough variation.

- Maia Connors suggested that we could look at the CLASS scores or use the validation study to see any variation.
- Teri Talan asked if there are multisite locations in ExceleRate or is it known what programs do not have multiple sites?
 - Cindy Zumwalt said that there are 462 programs and over 1,000 sites. That demonstrates there are multisite programs. But these sites do not include the City of Chicago. The City of Chicago is one program with many sites.

To summarize, Elliot Regenstein suggested that one possibility is a narrow focus on multisite programs should be done to look at fiscal data. Second, a broader alternative and a pairing with the validation study looking at capacity of investing more broadly and funding choices within the context of ExceleRate. Lessons learned on achieving quality could be mapped.

- Of the two approaches, Jon Furr said the grant was intentionally drafted broadly to allow for consideration on what project will best support early childhood priorities. With a multisite approach, the research project will go in parallel with the data reporting aspects. This will help inform how projects are designed and what data ISBE would want at the site level. Much of the work on the validation study will look at site level. Leveraging the data that is being collected will be helpful.

Karen Berman said that for current programs in Illinois, every strand of funding isn't being shared with the state or State Board of Education.

- Dan Harris said in some instances, program managers know the funding streams for a given provider. State agencies could report funding if the focus is publically funded programs. But it is a big reach to ask programs to share their funding model. The state should know where programs are spending money. But the reason why programs are making the choice to spend money on one item versus the other is unknown. Karen said that she wanted to flag this issue as it was brought to the Early Learning Council about a year ago and wants to make that connection here.
- Elliot Regenstein said that getting useful information for multisite providers could help inform better policy decisions. Jon Furr responded that it is important to focus on potentially available information that will not burden programs. For non-profit organizations, 1099s are readily available.

B. Priority Question 2: What are the various cost savings resulting from publicly-funded early learning programs in terms of later educational and human service investments?

Rationale: Illinois must demonstrate the benefits of early childhood education programs in order to show a return on investment and to continue building support.

Elliot Regenstein referenced page two of the handout, "Project Outcomes". What's the investment and what's the return? One approach could be to make use of data already available on outcomes from the LDS. In terms of return, there could be information useful from the LDS such as 3rd grade reading and high school graduation.

- Jon Furr said that integrating early childhood and preschool data from the unduplicated count can be linked to ISBE's data. But there is a short-term life on the data. 2013 is the start date of data and there are some limitations on the time frame.
- Maia Connors asked who are we talking about and in what terms? ROI is available from 40 year-old longitudinal studies and those often use crime rates but it is important be careful what indicators we may want to use.

Karen Berman suggested another approach: investment in early identification and how the state can identify kids early. Illinois has a lot of data on which children are being screened and Early Intervention (EI) and Special Education information are both tracked. Within the state, it is unknown what happens to the children that are not eligible for EI. Full evaluations are done on close to 20,000 children that do not meet the requirements of a delay. But it is unclear what happens to these children overtime. Perhaps this approach can help the state obtain more information on the ROI or consider if EI needs increased funding. Karen said she is cautious about looking at 3rd grade reading scores and high school graduation rates. The restricted eligibility excludes many children from EI but state is likely spending dollars to provide services for those children elsewhere.

- Jon Furr stated that the LDS has wanted to extend matching from birth to three to EI data. There has not been a project to couple Preschool For All, Child Care Assistance Program, or even EI within the birth to three space. It might be a struggle but this is an opportunity. This is a consideration for the group.
- Elliot Regenstein said that this is an example of a narrow actionable item. It is less about making a case for early childhood programs but more about doing something better. Exploring EI and what happens to kids thereafter could look at investment and non-investment means in that arena. Karen said that she would be curious more about EI eligibility less about the actual screenings.
 - Ann Freiburg said that EI is difficult because it does crossover and is unclear how it can be accommodated.
- Teri Talan suggested that looking at children expelled from elementary grades, or children expelled from kindergarten. Elliot said the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS) data will provide better answers on that topic when it is fully rolled out.

Teri Talan suggested a question related to teacher qualifications. Teri mentioned particular interest in teacher fadeout based on the qualification of teachers in kindergarten, first and second grade. A big issue has been the appropriate age span in licensure to support young children. There has been a decision looming that could upturn the consensus regarding the educator license and kindergarten. Perhaps a research project can look at the outcomes of children taught by teachers certified with an early childhood credential versus teachers with a kindergarten endorsement.

- Elliot Regenstein agreed that this is a topic of interest but asked what the control group would be. Maia Connors said that if the rule change does in fact go through on the teacher license that would be the pre- and post- group to look at, before and after the rule change. Teri said that teacher fadeout is important as it could show if a preschool program is good enough versus those that are not. Elliot said that he does not believe the four-year period of this project will provide enough information to truly assess the problem.
- Jon Furr said that this does redirect the conversation back to a different question—what outcomes are we measuring? There are limitations at looking at third grade assessment data scores and perhaps KIDS it limited for this analysis.

Dan Harris asked regarding priority question two: what work will be done that would be different from what is already available? There are mountains of research by Heckman and the Wilder report. Dan asked the group if they are interesting in redoing the Wilder report, or possibly adapting the report.

- Elliot Regenstein said the idea of just reviewing investment in early learning for a four year study doesn't seem quite right. But the frame the earlier EI question might be a good strategy. Looking at funding decisions made within early learning to see if Illinois is getting a ROI from the intake process and seeing if the intake process is leading to better outcomes down the road is important. Or assessing if spending money to look at child one-time and missing opportunities is another important aspect. There is a micro-system within the early child sphere that is not fully understood and getting a better idea of what the impacts are and how the state can act differently.
 - Anna Colaner asks if the group is interested only in what dollars are reaching needy kids through screenings or serving those kids who happen to show up to the screenings first.
 - Karen Berman said that the question relates more to "reaching the right kids". As a state, Illinois has decided not to increase investment to expand the eligibility level. At this point, if a child does not reach the threshold, there is no continuum of services because the unqualified children do not necessarily receive access to high-quality programs. Rather, what happens to

those children two or three years in the future? Are the current guidelines too restrictive? Karen said that she wonders what happens to the children that miss the cut-off requirements. Do those children then become rescreened again in six months? Do those children still not qualify but perhaps show up in kindergarten in special education? Research supports that EI services are a cost-effective investment. It is possible to do a demonstration project perhaps with a few Child Family Connections.

- Maia Connors said that an assessment can look at children right before and after the cut-off point of eligibility to see where kids are on either side of the line and then extrapolate across.

Elliot Regenstein asked the group if this question would be the focus going forward. Teri Talan said that this question might perhaps be the low-hanging fruit but asked if more review should be done on programs like the Child Care Assistance Program or Preschool For All.

- Elliot said that by statute, Preschool For All is meant to serve every child although it might not be translated as such in practice as a result of state investment. Child Care Assistance Program is different and a research study could look at eligibility cut offs but questions related to what invest and returns are debatable if the program is viewed as a work support or an educational program.
- Teri said that perhaps the question should review data on full day programming in preschool and child care assistance to look a dosage and the comprehensive nature of programs. Maia Connors said that a lot of research has already been done to look at dosage but cost hasn't been answered and this is an aspect that could contribute to current research.
- Anna Colaner said that it is tricky because blending and braiding of funds is done so frequently that dosage can be the same yet there are difference in the service delivery model in Preschool For All, child care assistance and Head Start.

Karen Berman asked for the timeline for feedback and design.

- Anna Colaner said that state leaders will make a decision on what should be included but a decision will need to be presented to ISBE in April.
- Jon Furr said that he will need to speak to ISBE to see if there is an adjustment to the timeline. In late spring or early summer a Request for Proposals will likely be released. A research partner will further refine the broader questions in various stages. State leaders will make a decision on what is included but the list of questions as a state will be narrowed by April. Jon said it's helpful to see what parameters we can cross and refine for further discussion with leadership and other agencies.

Anna Colaner thanked the group for the input.